



A Parent's Guide

To the Head Start Home-Based Program Option



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A Parent's Guide

To the Head Start Home-Based Program Option

Welcome to our Head Start home-based program!

You may be the mother or father of a baby or a toddler in Early Head Start, or you may be the parent of a Head Start preschooler. Whatever the age of your child, helping him or her learn and grow is a big job. It is an exciting job. It is a hard job. Every mother and father, every family, can use some support. You can get this support from your Head Start home-based program and your home visitor.

If your family is enrolled in our home-based program, this guide is for you. It includes three parts:

Part One: The Head Start Home-Based Option describes what a home-based program is and what you can expect.

Part Two: You and Your Head Start Home Visitor explores how you and your Head Start home visitor can work together to best support your child's development.

Part Three: Things You Can Do: Turning Everyday Moments into Learning Moments offers ideas for how you can help your child learn day-by-day using objects and materials in your home regardless whether you are new to a program or a long-time participant.

We hope you find this information helpful. We look forward to working with you.

"As a parent, you get a say-so about what's going on in the program. Parents make the choices."

—Mother of a preschooler

"What you learn helps you in your community, with your family, definitely with your child—and it makes you feel good about yourself."

—Father of a toddler



PART ONE:

The Head Start Home-Based Program Option

Introducing the Head Start Home-Based Option

Imagine your child two years from now, five years, ten years, as an adult. What do you want for your child? What do you want your child to learn? What kind of person do you want your child to be?

The Head Start home-based program option was created to help you help your child reach these goals—and others you may not have dreamed of yet. We believe in you! We are here to support you.

Once a week, a home visitor will come to your home. Your home visit will last 90 minutes. You, your spouse or partner, your child's brothers and sisters, and any other household members can all take part.

You will talk together about your child and how things are going for your family. Together, you will plan activities for you to do with your child during home visits and during the week between visits. Over time, as you get to know one another, you will become partners in helping your child grow and learn.

Twice a month, you and your child will meet with other children and parents. You

will have time to get to know one another and share interesting experiences. Your home visitor will be there too. We call these meetings “socializations.”

You can also take part in the program in other ways. One of the special things about Head Start is that mothers and fathers are truly involved. Your program, like every Head Start program, is designed to meet the needs of its children, families, and community. Your program will look to you and other parents for ideas to help shape program policies and experiences for children and families. To support you in taking an active part, your program will offer you training about how programs run and how group decisions are made.

As a parent of an enrolled child, you are automatically a member of your program's Parent Committee. Through the Parent Committee, you can help develop curriculum activities that address your child's interests and needs and that support your



child's education and healthy development. You can also advise the staff about program policies, elect representatives to the Policy Council (see below), and participate in hiring new staff members.

You will be invited to attend parent meetings where you will have a chance to share your experiences. You can also learn about topics such as feeding an infant or dealing with the challenging behaviors of a toddler or preschooler.

You may want to run for a seat on your program's Policy Council or Policy Committee. As a member of this group, you will work with the agency's governing body and management staff as well as with other community representatives to make policy decisions and plans about content areas such as education, health, parent involvement, and the building of partnerships with families and the community.

Getting Started: Home Visits and Socializations

During the first home visit, you, your family, and your home visitor will begin to get to know one another. You and other family members will introduce your child. Your home visitor will introduce him- or herself and tell you about the program.

Together, you will decide on a regular day and time for home visits that works for you. If the time you select is a time when your spouse or partner or other family members are not available, then you and your home visitor will need to think about ways to

share what goes on during home visits with them. And you will have to remember to ask for their ideas and questions.

Your home visitor will let you know when and where socializations will take place. Some programs may offer transportation. If not, your home visitor will help you figure out a way to get to socializations if you do not have a car or easy access to public transportation.

If you need to change an appointment or miss a socialization, for example, because of illness or a family emergency, please contact your home visitor. You can expect that he or she will do the same. You can record important contact information below:

Day and time for home visits:



Day, time, and place for socializations:

Contact number for my home visitor:

The Head Start Family Partnership Process

The family partnership process in Early Head Start and Head Start takes time. You and your home visitor will develop this partnership in a comfortable way that respects your needs and privacy.

In the first few weeks, your home visitor will ask you questions as a way of getting to know you. He or she will ask about your child's daily routine, medical history, and about what foods your child eats. He or she will ask about your dreams for your child and family—and about the challenges you face. He or she will also ask about what goals you have for your child and family.

Together, you will begin talking about the support you need to reach your goals. This talking is the start of a conversation that will last as long as you are in the program. If a spouse or partner or other family members cannot be present during home visits, you can include them in the conversation by sharing news of home visits with them and by sharing their thoughts with your home visitor.

Examples of Goals



Every family and child is unique. Each has different goals. Here are a few examples of goals:

- ▶ Find an apartment with more space because a new baby is on the way.
- ▶ Find a good doctor.
- ▶ Get a driver's license.
- ▶ Calm a baby who is always fussy.
- ▶ Learn how to handle a toddler who gets into everything.
- ▶ Teach a 4-year-old to dress himself.

Your goals are the basis of your work together. Over time, as they may change, so will the focus of your work.

It is up to you to decide what personal information you want to share and when. Many of us find it easier to share dreams and concerns with someone we know well. As you get to know your home visitor better, you will likely have more to talk about. You can rest assured your home visitor will respect your privacy.

I think one of the things you have to do is to accept people for who they are, accept their values.... Let them know whatever happens, that you'll be there to help them.

—A home visitor

Thanks to my program, I am able to see a good future for myself completing my education, to seek a good job, my children getting a good education and to make true my husband's and my dream to get our own house and be a happy family.

—Mother of three children

Some Things to Think About



Here are some things to think about with family members. Your thoughts may give you ideas of things you want to share with your home visitor:

We feel good about our family because

Over the next 3 months, we would like our family to

Our family is having trouble with

The best thing about being a parent is

The hardest thing about being a parent is

Our baby/toddler/preschooler loves to

I want my baby/toddler/preschooler to

I want to learn more about



What You Can Expect During a Home Visit

The main focus of home visits is your child's development. During each visit, an activity or experience will be presented for you and your child to enjoy together. To give you a picture of what to expect, here is a list of things that usually occur:

- ▶ Talking about what happened during the week;
- ▶ Reviewing plans for this week's activity or experience;
- ▶ Carrying out the activity or experience;
- ▶ Talking about how things went;
- ▶ Making a plan for next time; and
- ▶ Sharing information about program or community activities.

"Our home visitor helps us think about how our baby is doing and gives us good ideas of things to do with him. She is like a friend who comes to our home to support us."
—Mother and father of an infant

What You Can Expect During Socializations

Socializations are a time when you, your child, and other parents and their children come together. In some programs, these events are also known as "group experiences" or "group time." These are opportunities to build on the goals you set during home visits.

During socializations, you will be focused on different things, depending on your situation:

- ▶ **If you are the parent of a new baby,** socializations may be a time for you to hold your baby in your arms and watch how he or she responds to what is going on or a time for you to talk with another new parent. As your child grows, activities you do together such as fingerplays, singing a song, or playing "roll the ball" are a chance to get to know your child better and to have fun together.
- ▶ **If you are the parent of an infant or toddler,** the focus of these group experiences is your relationship with your child. From birth, babies are aware of other people and are eager to build relationships. They interact with you by making eye contact, by smiling, by cooing, by reaching out, and over time, by talking. As you and your baby participate in a group, you can learn about how your baby responds to you and others. This information will help you make decisions about how best to respond to your baby.

It's fun. You get to talk with other parents.

—Mother of an infant

I see him do things that he doesn't do at home and it gets me really excited.

—Mother of a preschooler

- ▶ **If you are the parent of a preschooler**, the focus of these group experiences is learning about how your child interacts with other people. What you learn will help you figure out ways to support your child's social development.

What happens at socializations may vary. Your home visitor will be there doing group activities with children. These activities will give you the chance to learn more about how your child gets to know and plays with other children. You will also be able to see how the staff person guides children's behavior (for example, by giving them choices), and you will get ideas that you can try at home. Sometimes you and other parents will be invited to lead activities. At

other times, you and other parents may have a group discussion with one staff person while another staff person is with the children.

No matter what your child's age, group socializations will give you the chance to

- ▶ be out of the house and meet other parents;
- ▶ assist in organizing activities, gathering materials, and preparing snacks;
- ▶ share what you know and learn with other parents and Early Head Start or Head Start staff members;
- ▶ attend presentations about safety, nutrition, discipline, or other topics of interest;
- ▶ learn that you are not alone in the challenges and joys of raising a young child;
- ▶ share activity ideas and things you learn with family members; and most important of all,
- ▶ strengthen your relationship with your child.



PART TWO: You and Your Head Start Home Visitor

Learning From One Another and Becoming A Team

You, your family, and your home visitor have much to learn from one another. You each bring important but different information to your work together.

You know what is special about your family. You know your family's culture. You know where your family is and where you want to go. You know your successes. You know the challenges you face.

You see your child every day in many different situations. Some of the things you have learned about your child might include

- ▶ what your child likes to see, touch, and hear;
- ▶ how your child responds when things get too noisy or confusing;
- ▶ your child's favorite foods, songs, and activities;
- ▶ what makes your child happy, sad, angry, or excited;
- ▶ how best to comfort your child when he or she is upset; and you also know
- ▶ what you want for your child.

Do you have other things to add?



"It helps to know we have support and somebody cares. Our future looks brighter here."

—A father new to this country

"One of the things I love about my job is that I am always learning from families. I only hope they learn as much from me as I do from them."

—A home visitor

Home visitors know how families and children grow and change. They know how to offer support. They know fun and interesting learning activities that you can do with your child in your home. They know agencies in your community and how to access services such as housing, nutrition, and health.

As you share what you know with your home visitor, you will both have a clearer picture of how best to support your family and child. Sometimes, your work together will focus on a family need or interest. Most of the time, it will focus on you and your child. The purpose of your work is to help your family reach its goals and help your child grow to his or her full potential.

As the months go by, you will continue learning from one another. Sometimes, you will have questions—so will your home

visitor. Ask them. Learn together. Over time, you will become a team. And through teamwork, you can make a positive difference in your child's life today—and in the future.

Who Does What

As members of any team, each of you has different responsibilities. During home visits—and, of course, in between—one of your jobs as a parent is to introduce and share interesting and fun activities with your child. You are important to your child, so as you sing to your baby, build a block tower with your toddler, or create an obstacle course for your preschooler, you can help your child feel good about him- or herself and excited about learning, and you can make your relationship even stronger. (See the section titled **You Are Your Child's First Teacher** on page 13 for more information.)

While you focus on your child, your home visitor will focus on you. He or she may focus on you in a variety of ways such as showing you how you might do an activity like reading with your infant and toddler, or bringing a needed ingredient for a recipe you want to try out with your preschooler.

As you feel ready, your home visitor will step back, and you will take over. Sometimes, the home visitor may sit and watch what you are doing. At other times, he or she may join in the fun. And he or she will always be available to listen, ask questions, learn from you, offer suggestions, provide information, and share the ups and downs that are part of parenting a young child.

Planning Together

Planning will be an ongoing part of your work together. You bring your in-depth knowledge of your child to the process. Your home visitor brings his or her experience of planning for many children of a similar age.

Together, you will share ideas and choose activities and experiences for you to do with your child—during home visits and in between. Don't be surprised if you find that your child responds in one way when you do an activity and in another way with a different family member. Each relationship between a child and adult is a special one and that relationship shapes what happens between them. You and family members can learn about doing activities from watching one another and sharing ideas.



“Basically now when our home visitor comes, I take over.

—Mother of three children

“When a parent is doing an activity, I step back. I want them to be in charge. If they need encouragement or help, I'll be there to help them.

—A home visitor

The activities you choose will depend on

- ▶ your child's age;
- ▶ your child's interests;
- ▶ your child's abilities;
- ▶ your child's personality;
- ▶ your goals for your child;
- ▶ the program's curriculum; and
- ▶ what you and your child will enjoy doing together.

For example, to help your baby learn and grow, you might plan to

- ▶ sing them a song;
- ▶ take a walk outdoors;
- ▶ make a mobile to hang over their crib;
- ▶ offer your baby a rattle and watch to see how he or she responds; or
- ▶ offer your baby a new finger food; or

For your toddler, you might plan to

- ▶ read a story;
- ▶ tape some shelf paper to the table and offer crayons for scribbling;
- ▶ do fingerplays together;
- ▶ make a snack together;
- ▶ make play dough; or
- ▶ make a set of blocks from empty milk cartons and then build something together.

For your preschooler, you might plan to

- ▶ sort the laundry by color;
- ▶ play a matching game;
- ▶ make applesauce;
- ▶ do a puzzle;
- ▶ go outdoors and take a walk, talking about things you see and hear; or

- ▶ cut pictures from a magazine and make up a story about them together.

Whatever activities you decide on, remember three things:

1. Your home is filled with wonderful learning materials that will invite your child's creativity and discovery.
2. Your home visitor is there to support you.
3. Have fun!

At the end of each home visit, you and your home visitor will talk about and record how the day's visit went. You may ask yourselves the following questions:

- ▶ What went well today?
- ▶ What didn't work so well? For your child? For you?
- ▶ What could you do differently next time?

You will use this information along with what you both know about your child and your program's curriculum to plan for the next visit. And the process begins again.

Closing Thoughts

Your home-based program and home visitor are here for you and your family. As you share questions and information as well as face challenges and laugh together, you become a team. While you support your child, your home visitor supports you. By working together, you give your child a good start on the path to success in school and in life.

PART THREE: Things You Can Do

Turning Everyday Moments into Learning Moments

The following three resources can be used on your own or with your home visitor to explore the many ways that you help your children learn during your every day routines.

Children are born eager to learn. They want to know everything. They constantly explore to find the answers to their many questions. What happens when I'm hungry and I cry? Shake this rattle? Kick at the mobile hanging over the changing table? Hold my arms out to you? Drop my spoon? Poke this play dough with my finger? Flush the toilet? Take another child's cracker? Stack this block on top of another one? Mix red paint with blue? Drop a plastic spoon in a pan of water, then a metal spoon?

On your home visit, and during the week in between visits, you have many opportunities to support your child's learning during ordinary experiences that happen each day, such as preparing a meal, walking to the store, or taking a bath. Use these ideas to think about the things that you can do every day to help your children wonder and learn about their world.

"Your home is a natural learning environment. You can use what you already have. You don't have to spend lots of money for children to enjoy themselves and learn."

—A home visitor

"I like to make puzzles out of cardboard. I really can't afford to buy them so I make puzzles that show body parts, different fruits, numbers ... anything that will help her learn."

—Parent of a preschooler





You Are Your Child's First Teacher:

How You Help Your Children Learn

Whether you are new to parenting and home-based programs or are the parent of several children who have been in a program for years, you are your child's first teacher. Because you are so important to your child, they pay attention to what you say and do. They learn by watching and listening to you and other family members day after day.

But how do you help your child learn? To discover the answer, look to your own experience.

Think about someone who helped you learn something new. It could be someone you knew as a child or met as an adult. This person should be someone who helped you feel good to be a learner.

What did you learn? You may have learned colors and shapes, a song, the alphabet. You may have learned how to write your name, ride your bike, tie your shoe. Or perhaps you learned how to take the subway, drive a car, bake a cake, program your VCR, or use a computer.

Think for a few minutes about what this person did to help you learn. For example, he or she may have

- ▶ planned interesting things for you to see and do;
- ▶ been there when you needed help;
- ▶ asked you open-ended questions—questions that have many answers;
- ▶ listened to you;
- ▶ discovered your interests and figured out ways to help you learn more about them;
- ▶ kept you safe;
- ▶ given you enough time to explore;
- ▶ been patient if you spilled something or made a mistake; or
- ▶ been happy and excited with you when you discovered something new.

You can help your child learn by doing these same things. Some you may already do. Others may be new ideas that you want to try. Your home visitor can help you discover what works best for you and your child.

"The parent is the primary educator of his child. There is nobody that has a better connection with your child."

—Father of a preschooler

You may want to do this exercise with any other family members in your home. How were your experiences the same or different from each other?



Add any other thoughts about ways to help someone learn:



There's No Place Like Your Home for Learning: *How Children Learn From Everyday Moments*

Your child learns about him- or herself, other people, and the surrounding world every day. For your child, everyday moments—getting dressed, preparing a meal, setting the table, taking a walk, taking a bath, reading a book—are learning moments. They are filled with interesting things to see, touch, smell, hear, taste, explore, and do. For example, let's look at what your child might learn from getting dressed (see box below).

Your home is filled with interesting things to see and do for your infant, toddler, or preschooler. Things that are fun and can

help them learn are right there in your own kitchen, living room, closet, and even the garage.

Some of these (as you will see in the chart on the next page) can be turned into fine toys and materials to explore and learn from. But be aware; others can be dangerous. These dangerous items include glass bottles, toys or other objects such as balloons and marbles that can cause choking, plastic bags that can cause suffocation, and cleaning solutions or medicines that can turn into poisons in a child's hands. Remember, young children are curious and

Getting Dressed

When you:

Hold your baby securely but gently as you change a wet shirt

Talk with your baby about what you are doing; pause and listen when he or she coos and babbles back

Play peek-a-boo as you pull your toddler's shirt over his or her head

Let your toddler decide between wearing red pants and the green pants with flowers

Hang a hook at child level so your preschooler can hang up his or her coat

Start the zipper on your preschooler's jacket but let him or her finish pulling it up

Your child might be learning:

I can trust you to keep me comfortable. I can trust you to keep me safe.

People take turns listening and talking when they talk with each other.

People still exist even though I can't see them.

You respect me. What I want matters. I can decide.

I am a helper. I can hang up my coat all by myself.

I can do it! When I need a little help, I can count on you.

tend to get into everything. To make your home “child safe,” you and your home visitor should do an inspection tour, identify hazards, and eliminate or correct them. Making your home safe is an important way to help your child learn.

Look at how many things children of different ages can do and learn with three simple, safe, everyday objects: old magazines, a pot and wooden spoon, and a large cardboard box.

Household Object	Your infant might:	Your toddler might:	Your preschooler might:
Old magazines	Learn the world is an interesting place when you cover a pretty picture with contact paper and hang it by his or her changing table.	Learn new words as you talk together about what you see.	Learn about colors as he or she cuts out pictures of things that are blue, then things that are red. Learn language skills when he or she uses the pictures to illustrate stories that he or she makes up.
A pot and wooden spoon	Feel confidence and think, “I can do it!” when he or she makes a loud sound by banging the spoon on the pot.	Feel proud to be like you when he or she pretends to stir and make dinner.	Learn about measuring and mixing when he or she helps you make play dough.
A large cardboard box	Begin to learn that you will still be there when they crawl in and out of the box and find you are still there watching.	Learn about reading and writing when you work together to turn the box into a house and then you write his or her name on the front door.	Develop imagination and learn about new places when you help him or her turn the box into a car and take a pretend trip.

Write down some of the ideas you have about things in your home that your children like to play with and what you think they may be learning during their play:







Make Every Moment Count!

Four tips to help you turn everyday moments and objects at home into rich learning opportunities for your child

- **Make your home child-safe.** Young children learn by touching, tasting and doing. They depend on you to keep them safe. Always keep your eyes open for possible dangers and eliminate them. For example, cover electrical outlets, install safety gates on stairways, secure windows, store harmful household products and medicines out of reach, lock entrance doors, be sure smoke detectors are installed and working, keep emergency numbers by the telephone, and have a backup plan if your phone isn't available.



Make a list of some of the things you can do to make your home safer for your children:

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins or other markings on the paper.

Make a plan with your home visitor to accomplish these tasks.

- **Look at everyday things and events through the eyes of your child.** What might your child see, touch, taste, hear, smell, and do? What might your child learn? Everyday experiences can give your child a wonderful chance to explore and learn.

Think about something you did with your child today and what he or she might have learned from the experience and describe it here:



Would you do anything different next time?

- **Take time to enjoy everyday routines and happenings.** Take time to pop the soap bubbles in the bathtub, watch a bird in a tree, and listen to the sounds outside your window.

How does your routine change when you slow down and follow your child's pace?



- [illegible]



Use this space for additional notes.



[illegible]

Use this space for additional notes.



